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SUBJECT: CAMPAIGN TO COMBAT EARLY MARRIAGE IN YEMEN SEEKS  
USG SUPPORT

1. Summary. Pol/Off attended an Oxfam-sponsored presentation on early marriage in Yemen on June 7. Yemeni researchers presented results from a national study on the prevalence, causes, and societal consequences of early marriage. Oxfam, in conjunction with Save the Children - Sweden, plans to launch a public awareness campaign on the negative consequences of early marriage and to lobby for a new law establishing a minimum age of marriage. The campaign will be waged by local NGOs in cooperation with ROYG agencies, and with technical and financial support from a variety of international organizations and foreign missions. End Summary.

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Prevalence of Early Marriage  
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2. The study concluded that early marriage (defined as below 18 years) is prevalent in Yemen and exacerbates gender inequality and poverty. Researchers, under the auspices of the Women's Studies and Development Center, found that 52.1 percent of Yemeni women are married at an early age, compared with only 6.7 percent of men.

3. Poverty leads the list of root causes of early marriage, but moral concerns also play a significant role. Limited access to educational and job opportunities means many families consider female members an economic drain, encouraging many to pass on the financial responsibility to a husband at the earliest opportunity. The study also found that many rural families are concerned with protection of their moral integrity. These families believe early marriage prevents their daughters from getting into trouble in their teenage years, hence preserving familial honor and reputation.

4. Researchers also concluded that early marriage perpetuates the destructive cycle of inequality and poverty. Girls who marry before 18 years old are more likely to be impoverished, poorly educated, and lack access to basic healthcare.

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Alliance Against Early Marriage  
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5. Oxfam and Save the Children - Sweden are working to create an alliance of local NGOs, international aide organizations, foreign missions and ROYG agencies. The group hopes to partner with the ROYG and local media outlets to launch a public awareness campaign on the negative health and economic consequences of early marriage, as well as to lobby for a law to raise the minimum age of marriage in Yemen. Oxfam plans to officially kick off on July 11, International Population Day, when the Women's National Committee will present these research findings to a large gathering of ROYG officials.

6. Comment: Oxfam has requested USG support for the campaign against early marriage. Several international organizations have already joined the alliance, including UNDP, ILO and the German Development Service (DED). The Oxfam-led group appears well organized and committed. Utilizing this study, Oxfam and the other partners are developing a comprehensive plan. Acutely aware of the sensitive nature of early marriage in a conservative society, the group is committed to helping local NGOs and ROYG agencies take the lead in this effort. Media training is a potential area for USG contribution. Instruction to improve basic reporting skills and understanding of women's issues would significantly increase the effectiveness of the media campaign. Pol/Econ will coordinate with PD to evaluate training options. End Comment.  
Khoury